What is claimed is:

A method of providing access to help information
 relating to components of a computer system, comprising:
 accessing a help database having data identifying a
 plurality of help topics pertaining to a plurality of
 components of the computer system;

presenting the plurality of help topics in a user interface based on the data in the help database;

detecting a selection of a help topic through the user interface;

retrieving help contents of the selected help topic; and displaying the retrieved help contents.

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- 2. A computer-readable medium having computerexecutable instructions for performing the method of claim 1.
- 3. A method as in claim 1, wherein the presenting
 20 presents the plurality of help topics in accordance with a taxonomy structure.
- A method as in claim 3, wherein the help database contains data specifying a mapping between each of the plurality of help topics and a corresponding node of the taxonomy structure.

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5. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method of claim 3.

- 6. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help database contains data specifying a search keyword associated with said each help topic.
 - 7. A method as in claim 6, wherein the user interface includes an interface element for prompting a selection to perform a keyword search.
 - 8. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help database contains data specifying an index string associated with said each help topic.
 - 9. A method as in claim 8, wherein the user interface includes an interface element presenting an option to view index strings of the help topics.
- 20 10. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help contents of said selected help topic are stored in a file written in a markup language.
- 11. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help contents of said selected help topic include an active component, and the displaying includes executing the active component.

- 12\ A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component pertains to an automated fix.
- 13. A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component pertains to problem/incident escalation to a remote network site.
 - 14. A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component is a script.
 - 15. A method as in claim 11, wherein the displaying includes confirming that the help contents for the selected help topic are trusted before executing the active component.
 - 16. A method as in claim 15, wherein the displaying includes bypassing security detection when executing the active component.
- 17. A method as in claim 1, wherein the retrieving
 20 includes obtaining a Unified Resource Locator (URL) associated
 with the selected help topic and obtaining the help contents
 for the selected help topic based on the Unified Resource
 Locator.
- 25 18. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 17.

- 19. A method as in claim 17, wherein the Unified Resource Locator for the selected topic identifies a local directory of the computer system.
- 20. A method as in claim 17, wherein the Unified Resource Locator for the selected topic identifies a location accessible to the computer system through a network.
- 21. A method as in claim 1, further comprising:

 10 receiving a call from an application identifying a help topic; and

retrieving help contents for the help topic identified in the call.

- 22. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 21.
- 23. In a computer system having a graphic user interface including a display and a user interface selection device, a
 20 method of providing help contents pertaining to components of a computer system, comprising:

displaying, in a user interface area, help categories on a taxonomy structure, said taxonomy structure categorizing a plurality of help topics pertaining to a plurality of components of the computer system;

upon receiving a selection of a help category on said taxonomy structure, displaying in the user interface area help

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topics in the taxonomy structure under the selected help category; and

upon receiving a selection of one of the displayed help topics, displaying help contents associated with the selected help topic.

- 24. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 23.
- 25. A method as in claim 23, further including displaying an interface element for prompting a selection of performing a keyword search for help topics.
- 26. A method as in claim 23, further including
 15 displaying an interface element for prompting a selection of viewing the help topics by index.
 - 27. A method of providing help contents to a computer system, comprising:
- receiving a help service update package presenting modifications to a help service system on the computer system, said modifications including adding a help topic to the help service system; and

updating a help service database to include the help

25 topic, the help service database containing data identifying a
plurality of help topics pertaining to different components of
the computer system.

28. A method as in claim 27, further including displaying a user interface to present the plurality of help topics for user access according to the data in the help service database identifying the plurality of help topics.

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- 29. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 28.
- 30. A method as in claim 27, wherein the receiving

 10 includes authenticating the help service update package based on a certificate included with the help service update package.
 - 31. A method as in claim 27, wherein the step of receiving includes retrieving from the help service update package a package description file containing a description of the modifications presented by the help service update package.
- 32. A method as in claim 27, wherein the updating includes storing in the help service a mapping between the added help topic and a taxonomy structure categorizing the plurality of help topics identified in the help service database.

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33. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 32.

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- 34. A method as in claim 27, wherein the help service update package includes update information regarding a content store of the help service system for identifying trusted help contents, and wherein the updating includes updating the content store according to the update information.
- 35. A computer-readable medium having a computer-readable data structure forming an update package for updating a help service system on a computer system, comprising:
- a first field containing data identifying a help topic to be added to a help service system; and
- a second field containing data identifying a mapping between the help topic and a taxonomy structure of the help service system for categorizing help topics installed on the help service system for a plurality of components of the computer system.
- 36. A computer-readable medium as in claim 35, wherein the data structure further includes a package description file containing a description of modifications to the help service system presented in the update package.
 - 37. A computer-readable medium as in claim 35, wherein the data structure further includes a certificate for authenticating the update package.

requesting, by the application, retrieval of help contents at a location indicated by a link, the link including a first portion identifying a namespace of help contents registered with a help service of the computer system;

invoking the help/service to retrieve the help contents from the location indicated by the link; and displaying the retrieved help contents.

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39. A method as in claim 38, wherein the help contents includes an active component.

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